

Dr. Vance Baird named as new Department of Horticulture Chair



William Vance Baird, alumni distinguished professor of molecular genetics and interim chair of the Department of Horticulture at Clemson University, has been named chairperson of the Michigan State University (MSU) Department of Horticulture. His appointment was approved by the MSU Board of Trustees at its Feb. 13 meeting and becomes effective July 1.

Baird succeeds Randy Beaudry, who has served as acting chairperson of the department since July 2007, and Ron Perry, who chaired the department from 2002 to 2007.

“Vance Baird has a strong background in outreach, teaching and research that affect the profitability and sustainability of a wide range of horticultural enterprises,” said Jeffrey D. Armstrong, dean of the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. “Through his leadership, the department will continue to build upon its nation-leading reputation of excellence and innovation that serves the needs of its constituents.”

Baird has been on the Clemson faculty since 1989. He has taught a broad range of courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels and has engaged stakeholders in numerous research and demonstration projects, most notably on environmental stress of horticultural crops as diverse as peaches and turfgrass. His research on genetic analysis of agricultural crops focuses on nuclear genome organization and the molecular basis for tolerating drought, salinity and low temperatures.

He has been an invited speaker at numerous symposia in the United States and abroad, and he has authored or co-authored seven book chapters and more than 50 peer-reviewed publications.

He has received numerous honors for his research and teaching during his more than 20-year career at Clemson, including being named an alumni distinguished professor in 2006 and receiving the Award for Faculty Excellence from the Clemson University Board of Trustees in 2004, 2007 and 2008. He has also received the Margaret Menzel award from the Botanical Society of America, the Ulysses P. Hedrick award from the American Pomological Society and the Outstanding Graduate Educator award from the American Society for Horticultural Science.

"The MSU Department of Horticulture has a rich history of significant accomplishments that have been of great benefit to the horticulture industry of Michigan and the nation," Baird said. "I am very excited by the opportunity to work with the outstanding faculty, staff and students as we continue to grow the department and its contributions to the research, instructional and outreach missions of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources."

Baird received his doctoral degree in biology from the University of Virginia (1983) and conducted postdoctoral research in genetics at the University of Georgia (1988). He received a master's degree in botany from Miami (Ohio) University (1978) and a bachelor's degree in botany and plant pathology from Oregon State University (1976).